

## Sharing the load

**Q:** *I appreciate the pampering from my children on Mother's Day. My problem is I need more help around the house the other 364 days. How can I get my children to take more responsibility around the house without coming off as the grumpy mom?*

**A:** Responsible parents want to develop responsibility in their children. Assigning children household tasks is one of the best ways to accomplish this goal. Chores will also establish helpful habits and good attitudes about work in your children. No matter what you may hear from your children or your inner voice, you are being a good mom when you divide the work with your children. By sharing the load, you will get the help you deserve and your children will learn to be more responsible.

### Children and Responsibility

"Why can't you be more responsible?" Have you ever said or heard that phrase? It's a common complaint of parents. We know that if a child has a sense of responsibility he will fare much better in this world, so instilling a sense of responsibility in your child is beneficial for him and you.

But how do we do that? We can give you our answer in a single sentence. *To teach a child to be responsible, you must give him responsibilities.* This is the key to teaching children responsibility. Children learn very little from lectures. They learn most by doing.

### Tips on Teaching Responsibility

The best way to teach a child responsibility is little by little, day by day. Here are some tips that will help you teach your children responsibility.

*Give them an example to follow.* Parents affect how their children think and feel about responsibility. Actions are far more influential than words. If parents put off doing unpleasant tasks until the last minute or make promises and don't follow through, then they shouldn't be surprised if their children do the same. Make sure your example is what you want your children to follow.

*Teach them the way you want to be taught.* Before entering the ministry I (Phil) was an apprentice carpenter learning my dad's trade. My dad started out by showing me how to do simple tasks, such as hammering and nailing without leaving "bear tracks" behind. Soon I had the skills needed to help him. Finally, he turned certain jobs completely over to me. Today I enjoy doing carpentry work. The same approach can be applied to parenting. Show your children how, and then allow them to gradually assume responsibility for the job.

*Make home a place where your children learn about the real world.* We did not say to make your home worldly. When your children leave home, do you want them to be able to survive and thrive? Of course you do! Prepare them by making home a place where they can practice. What if your child fails to do a job you've given him? You can't fire him, but there is another real world

option. You can hire his little sister to clean up his room and pay her from his allowance. If this sounds insensitive, just think about what will happen in the real world if he fails to do a job given to him by his boss.

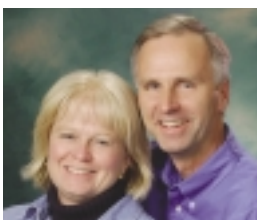
### Opportunities to Learn Responsibility

Parents should allow their children the opportunity to do more for themselves while expecting others to do less. When a child can walk, she can pick up her toys. At age three or four she can make her own bed. At five he can set the table and clear it. By age eight he should have a list of jobs to do each week. Parents must use their judgment as to when their children are ready to accept more responsibility. One of the signals that it's time to add responsibilities is when parents become overly frustrated. To us it sounds like your children may be ready for more responsibilities.

The apostles' actions in Acts 6:2-4 were approved by God. The work load was increasing. Instead of trying to do everything themselves, *the work was spread out among the church's members.* The same practice applies to the home. Parents should not try, or be expected

to try, to do everything. Instead, the work should be spread out among its members. When your children whine about what you have given them to do, simply remind yourself that you are doing what the apostles did—sharing the work load. This should give you the resolve to hold your children to their household tasks. ■

*You can't fire him, but there is another real world option.*



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Send your questions about family life to Phil and Bev Haas in care of THE LOOKOUT, 8121 Hamilton Avenue, Cincinnati, Ohio 45231 (fax 513-931-0950). Letters used for publication may be edited for the sake of space, clarity, or confidentiality. We regret that personal replies are not always possible.